

Facilitating Fatherhood: A Longitudinal Examination of Father Involvement Among Young Minority Fathers

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Abstract The effects of father absence on children have been well documented in research and range from increased risk of poverty, to increased risk of incarceration (Anderson et al. *Family Relations* 51(2):148–155, 2002). This study presents a longitudinal evaluation of young father's involvement with their children conducted within the scope of a teen parenting program in Arlington County, Virginia. The respondents in the study are young, mainly Hispanic fathers who come from lower socio-economic groups. The theoretical foundation for the parenting program was derived from Prochaska's Transtheoretical Model of Change (1979). Three scales of fatherhood involvement were assessed at four time periods, including two years post-program. Results from the evaluation indicated that all three fatherhood scales increased steadily and significantly from pre-test to two years post-program. Results support the notion that fatherhood involvement curricula have the potential to positively influence young fathers and keep them involved with their children. Suggestions for further research and discussion of public policy implications are included in the study.

Keywords Adolescents · Fatherhood · Hispanics · Minorities

Introduction

The negative effects of father absence have been well documented in research and include an increased risk of poverty, substance abuse, criminal involvement, and a decrease in ability to cope with trauma, disruption of development, and erosion of respect for authority figures (Anderson et al. 2002; Bilchik et al. 2001; Garry 1997;

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Travis et al. 2003; Turner and Peck 2002). Further, research also indicates the younger the father is at the time of a child's birth, the less likely he is to become, and remain, involved with the child. Numerous researchers have lamented over the paucity of research on fathers of children born to adolescent mothers (Bunting and McAuley 2004; Coleman 1998; Manza 2002). Sampling problems, such as inability to locate fathers and attrition, are commonly cited reasons for lack of research (Thompson and Walker 2004).

This paper presents a longitudinal evaluation of a young father's intervention program conducted within the scope of a teen parenting program called the *Caring Equation*, in Arlington County, Virginia. The program ran from 2003 to 2007 and served some 310 young fathers. The father's intervention program focused on locating fathers, and conveying the importance of father involvement and parenting through classes, activities, and counseling. The program also facilitated fathers getting involved with their children. The theoretical foundation for the program was derived from Prochaska's Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM) (1979).

There are several rationales for this study. Within the scope of contributing to current literature on young fathers, this study has several unique characteristics. First, sample is largely Hispanic young fathers, about whom there is little published empirical research. Second, the study also examines fatherhood involvement longitudinally, which may provide a more accurate picture of involvement among this group. Third, the program also incorporates some pre-natal father involvement, as research has indicated involvement prior to birth is a strong predictor of long-term father involvement. Fourth, the sample size in this study is comparatively large. Many other studies of young fathers have sample sizes of less than 50. Fifth, the study measures actual behavioral changes as opposed to attitude changes, and last, the study can provide some policy guidance for other programs that wish to target young, minority fathers.

Background

The role that father's play in the development and lives of their children differs across cultural groups and generations. Sociologist Queniert writes that even the conceptualization of fatherhood has changed dramatically over the past ten years (2004). However, literature has consistently indicated that positive father involvement is associated with positive cognitive, social, and emotional development of children (Lundahl et al. 2008; Tamis-LeMonda and Cabrera 2002). As a social issue, the effects of fatherhood or lack thereof can have a multi-generational impact, and this has not escaped the attention of policy makers. In 2006, the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative was passed, adding funds to an earlier fatherhood initiative. The purpose of this program is promote responsible fatherhood by funding programs that support relationship building between fathers and children in a variety of ways (<http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/2006Initiative/index.shtml>).

In the current study, focus is on adolescent Hispanic fathers and their involvement with their children. To date, little has been written about this group. However, there are a number of studies that address father involvement generally,

and father involvement among minority adults. This section reviews some of this literature in an effort to provide context for the current study.

In Western cultures, the role of fathers in infant care has historically been observation, with mothers deemed more biologically and socially suitable for infant care (Silverstein 1993). With the number of fathers who are absent from the home increasing each year, the impact of father involvement on children is an important area of research (Nelson 2004). Numerous studies indicate that father absence is correlated with disruptive behavior disorders, increased delinquency, and low academic achievement in children, and persistent poverty for the mother and her children (Fagan et al. 2003; Lundahl et al. 2008). Other research has indicated that fathers who are not involved at the beginning of the child's life become less involved with their children over time (Howard et al. 2006; Marsiglio et al. 2000a, b).

Howard et al. (2006) conducted a rare longitudinal examination of father's influence in children born to adolescent mothers. The majority of the fathers and the mothers in the sample were African American. The study followed 134 mothers and the children from pre-birth to age 10 and assessed father's contact and its effect on the child's academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment (provided by teachers). The study also factored in the mother's influence on child development. Results indicated that father involvement significantly predicted increased school success early on in the child's life and continued involvement had a significant impact on reading achievement through age 10. Gender of the child also played a role, as father involvement was associated with greater increases in both reading and math scores for male children than female children. Howard et al. (2006) note that a high proportion of African American adolescent mothers have not grown up with fathers, and tend to view fathers more negatively than other adolescents do.

Research has indicated that the best predictor of father involvement is accessibility, or the father's residential status (Nelson 2004). Hofferth et al. (2002) found that father's who are married and live with their children spend about four hours each day with their children. Children whose fathers are closely involved with them demonstrate greater social engagement, have relationships with extended family and friends, and later in life are more likely to earn higher wages, than children whose fathers are less involved (Nelson 2004). Recent research has also indicated that interventions designed to improve the quality of relationships between separated mothers and fathers can also lead to greater father involvement (Cowan et al. 2006).

There is a small body of research addressing father involvement and characteristics of fathers of children born to adolescent mothers. Research suggests that in the United States, fathers are typically only a couple of years older than teenage mothers (Coley and Chase-Landsdale 1998; Darroch et al. 1999; Howard et al. 2006). Numerous studies have indicated that young fathers are overwhelmingly from less educated, lower income, minority groups (Bunting and McAuley 2004). Further, many of these young fathers were also born to young parents. Some researchers suggest the intergenerational practice of young parenthood is so culturally entrenched, young fathers may view parenthood as normal, and not an impediment to their education, career or other plans (Gohel et al. 1997; Thompson

and Walker 2004). Nelson (2004) argues that these men may actually be more suited to fatherhood than previous research indicates.

In a study of pre-natal involvement of adolescent fathers, Fagan et al. (2003) found that involvement increased when the father was employed, remained romantically involved or had a good relationship with the mother, had high levels of empathy and there was a higher ratio of children born out of wedlock to friends of the mother. Earlier research on prenatal involvement indicated that young fathers are more likely to stay involved with their children if they are included in parenting decisions made during pregnancy (Elster and Lamb 1982).

In a study of parental satisfaction among adolescent mothers and fathers, Thompson and Walker (2004) found that mothers reported higher levels of parental satisfaction than fathers did, and low satisfaction among fathers was predicted by low self-esteem, younger age at first birth, and fewer or antagonistic social supports. Young fathers' relationships with maternal grandmothers have been identified in previous research as frequently antagonistic, which may lead to less paternal satisfaction and involvement (Bunting and McAuley 2004).

In a cross-cultural comparative study of parenting, Julian et al. (1994) assessed parenting attitudes, behaviors, and involvement among Hispanic, African American, Asian American, and Anglo American parents. Results from this study found few differences by ethnicity in parenting attitudes and parenting behaviors, but results did suggest Hispanic fathers tended to exhibit greater non-authoritarian involvement in their child's behavior compared to fathers in other cultural groups.

In more recent research on minority fathers, Saracho and Spodek (2007) examined cultural stereotypes and challenges underlying father involvement of Mexican American fathers. Specifically, the authors distinguish between traditional and contemporary gender roles for Mexican American fathers. For example, they cite a number of studies that refer to traditional characteristics of machismo as being macho, chauvinistic, boorish, and the aggressive leader of the household. On the other hand, contemporary research defines the same term as family oriented, being a provider and an egalitarian parent. Contemporary definitions are much better suited to the young men in the *Caring Equation*. Saracho and Spodek conclude by advocating more parenting programs for Mexican American fathers, and more attention be paid in research to this group.

Manza (2002) conducted a program evaluation of a parenting program targeting urban African American adolescent fathers brought into the program by way of their partners, in the same way fathers are brought into the *Caring Equation*. Results from Manza's evaluation indicated that parenting classes had to be combined with therapeutic counseling services in order for improvements in parenting to be made. It was only after young fathers in this program realized their self-worth and potential, that they were able to make a positive contribution to parenting.

The Caring Equation

The *Caring Equation* is a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funded project established in 2003 in Arlington County, Virginia, public schools. The program is a multifaceted intervention program whose goals are to teach and

improve parenting skills of teenage mothers and their male partners and encourage young parents to stay in school. Employing six full-time and several part-time caseworkers, the *Caring Equation* provides 10 core services to adolescents, which are mandated by HHS (see Table 1). The *Caring Equation* also provides a number of supplemental services.

Adolescents are referred to the *Caring Equation* through a number of channels. Most common is referral from school officials after a student drops out of school because of pregnancy. Adolescents who contact the county for parenting services or for information are also referred to the program. All participants are from families with annual incomes below \$40,000, and most (80%) are of Hispanic origin. In most cases, the mothers are brought into the program first, and then the fathers are located and brought into the program. However, not all fathers are located and not all fathers who are located wish to participate in the program. In rare instances, couples come into the program at the same time. Participants can remain in the program for up to one year after their baby has been born, and may participate in other county programs simultaneously.

Briefly, the fatherhood involvement program in the *Caring Equation* builds on Prochaska's (1979) Transtheoretical Model of change (TTM). This theory stresses the potential for development and growth, and it assumes that with appropriate stimuli, individuals can learn new, more appropriate behaviors. Research using the TTM has indicated distinct phases of cognitive and behavioral processes that can lead to changes (Prochaska and Velicer 1997). These phases are pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance. Although each father would progress through stages at different rates and in some cases there may be some regression, the program was designed so that pre-contemplation was expected to occur prior to and during intake and during the first couple of months of the program, when the father has no intention of changing his behavior. The second stage, contemplation, occurs several months into the program, when fathers begin to communicate a desire to change and become more involved with their child.

Table 1 Caring equation core services (Robbers 2008)

Core service	
1.	Pregnancy testing and maternity counseling
2.	Adoption counseling and referral services
3.	Primary and preventive health services (such as prenatal care and childbirth classes)
4.	Nutrition information and counseling
5.	Referral for sexually transmitted diseases (including counseling and HIV education)
6.	Referral for pediatric care
7.	Education services relating to family life and problems with adolescent sexual relations (including education on human sexuality)
8.	Education and vocational services
9.	Mental health services and referral
10.	Counseling and referral for family planning services

However, they are likely to view obstacles to change as insurmountable or lacking enough rewards to be worth the effort. The preparation phase occurs when fathers are actually ready to take steps to change and the program hoped to get fathers to this point between months four and six. The action phase occurs next, which is followed by the maintenance phase. With a view to helping young fathers through these stages, skills development, knowledge of risk factors, and the importance of repeated exposure to messages are incorporated into program interventions.

In addition, program interventions also draw on components from empowerment theory. This theoretical concept is broad, so in this case it is narrowly defined as pertaining to three realms of adolescent life: self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-identity. Empowerment can be defined as an individual's belief in himself or herself to complete a task and the perceived impact that individual has on his or her own future (Bandura 1986). In this case, the task is to cope with the stressors of teenage parenting in addition to normal adolescent life stressors.

Fathers in this program attended father evenings, weekend workshops, job training workshops, and group sessions. The educational components of the program were all conducted using tutorial like settings—small groups of fathers and their caseworker from the program. All caseworkers for the fathers are Hispanic males to facilitate better communication and relationship building (Manza 2002). Father's also attend family activities with their partners and extended families, and attend private sessions with their partners and caseworker. In addition to measuring father involvement, the program evaluation also measured parenting attitudes, which are not discussed in the current paper (author cite).

Methodology

Sample and Procedure

The sample for this study comprises young fathers participating in the *Caring Equation* program. The fathers in the sample ranged in age from 16 to 30 ($M = 20$) when they began this program. Consistent with other literature in the field (Bunting and McAuley 2004), fathers in this group are on average, several years older than their partners. The age range of their children ranged from zero, or not yet born, to three years. The average age of the children was eight months old. Demographic statistics appear below in Table 2.

Table 2 Demographic information

Variable	Frequency/summary statistics
Age	16–30 ($M = 20.19$; $SD = 4.58$)
Race: African American	12.0% ($n = 29$)
Asian	1.0% ($n = 2$)
Latino	80.0% ($n = 194$)
White	7.0% ($n = 17$)
Other	1.0% ($n = 2$)
Age of child at pre-test	0–3 ($M = 0.81$; $SD = 1.01$)

More than 90% of the participants in this study are from minority groups. Eighty percent of the fathers are Hispanic and 12 percent are African American. Seven percent of the fathers are white, just less than one percent is Asian, and just less than one percent claimed some other racial group. All the fathers in this study are from low socio-economic groups with household incomes less than \$40,000 as this is a *Caring Equation* eligibility criterion. In some areas of the United States, household income of around \$40,000 may allow for a comfortable standard of living, however, Arlington County is located in the Washington D.C. Metropolitan area, which is a high cost of living area (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). The median income in Arlington County for the year 2006 was \$87,350, and the median value of a home in the county for the same year was \$589,300 (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).

This study employed a pre- post-test study design. The fatherhood involvement pre-test instruments were administered to fathers during the intake process, and 301 fathers completed the pre-test. The instrument was available in English and Spanish. Post-tests were administered by caseworkers during father's evenings, family activity days or in private sessions with case-workers. Included in this analysis are results from the pre-test and post-tests at six months, 12 months, and two years. The first post-test period of six months was chosen because prior to six months children may not yet have been born, and fathers had not been exposed to much of the curriculum. At six months, the curriculum had covered the importance of education, financial responsibility, and the father's role in the life of their child. The 12-month post-test provides a picture of whether the men were retaining the information from the curriculum given the program was ending, and whether their parenting behavior was still changing. Because fathers are only eligible to remain in the program for one year, the two-year post-test allows an assessment of whether the program is having a lasting effect on fathers' behavior without the program's constant reinforcement. These time points also best fit Proschaska's TTM phases described earlier.

Participation in the *Caring Equation* evaluation was voluntary and was approved by the Institutional Review Board of [author's institution].

Measures

The fatherhood involvement instrument asks respondents how often they do a range of activities with their children. All responses were scored on a scale from zero, which indicated the father never did those activities, to six, which indicated they did those activities everyday. Three subscales of fatherhood involvement were created from the instrument, which mimic Lamb's (2000) three-part typology of fatherhood involvement. The first is father/child interaction, which is considered the highest form of parenting in this study. Nine items were used for this subscale, and examples of items are feeding, playing, bathing, holding when not crying, holding when crying, and reading. Scores on the scale ranged from 0 to 42 ($M = 21.01$; $SD = 10.53$).

The second subscale of fatherhood created was called assistance. This subscale was created using seven items, such as talking to a doctor or calling a clinic, and cleaning up mess made by baby. Assistance is considered the second most important form of parenting. Scores on the scale ranged from 0 to 24 ($M = 11.13$; $SD = 5.98$).

The last subscale created was called support. Five items were used to construct this scale, such as providing money, providing clothes, and providing a place to live. Scores on the scale ranged from 0 to 30 ($M = 13.13$; $SD = 7.26$).

Given the fatherhood involvement instrument was developed by the researchers for this study, reliability of the scales were conducted. Cronbach's alpha was employed as a measure of reliability for each of the three subscales. All three indicated very high reliability as the alpha values for interaction, assistance and support were 0.96, 0.97, and 0.95 respectively.

As is common in social science research, exploration of underlying factors in the scales was conducted using principal components analysis without rotation (Kim and Mueller 1978). All items loaded on two factors; however, a third eigenvalue was close to 1.0. Scree discontinuity analysis revealed three factors, which reflect the three subscales in the study.

Method of Analysis

Two stages of analysis are used in this paper. First, zero order correlations were examined to assess relationships between the main study variables. Second, a repeated measures General Linear Model (GLM) was constructed to assess the changes in the three main study variables over time. Greenhouse-Geisser adjustment was used to assess sphericity (Tabachnick and Fidell 2001).

Given there have been few studies on the effects of parenting programs on fathering behavior, we hypothesized that father involvement would increase as time in the program increased. We do expect some long-term effects of the program on father involvement, but rather than pose specific time related hypotheses, we view this study more as a starting point for future program development and assessment.

Results

Correlation Results

Zero order correlations were run with the main study variables at the pre-test and two-year post-test stage. Other post-tests were not included given the high probability of multicollinearity between the variables. Results from zero order correlations indicate that the age of the child was significantly correlated with the interaction and support measures at the pre-test stage; with both coefficients indicating an older child was associated with higher scores on both scales. The age of the father was negatively correlated with pre-test support scores, indicating older fathers scored lower on this measure. This seems counter-intuitive, but younger fathers in this sample are teenagers who may experience factors such as family pressure, which influence the amount of support they provide for their children.

Correlations for the two-year post-test variables revealed a significant relationship between age of the father and interaction with children. This relationship was positive indicating older fathers were scoring higher on the scale. There was also a negative correlation between age of the child and assistance, indicating that greater

Table 3 Zero order correlations

Variable	Age of father	Assistance pre-test	Interaction pre-test	Support pre-test	Assistance post-2-years	Interaction post-2 years	Support post-2 years
Age of child	0.09	0.07	0.39**	0.23**	-0.39**	-0.07	0.02
Age of father		0.01	0.03	-0.15*	-0.01	0.26**	-0.04
Assistance pre-test			0.33**	0.33**	-0.01	0.18**	0.17**
Interaction pre-test				0.31**	-0.24**	0.09	0.16**
Support pre-test					-0.08	0.18**	-0.05
Assistance post-2 years						0.12**	0.01
Interaction post-2-years							0.13*

Note: * indicates $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

father assistance was being provided to younger children. The pre and post-test fatherhood scales were significantly, but only weakly correlated with each other. Correlation results appear in Table 3.

Repeated Measures GLM

The model statistics outlined in Table 4 below indicate 93 percent of the variance is explained in the dependent variables over time (Wilks' Lambda = 0.073), which is

Table 4 Repeated measures GLM

Predictor	Mean (SD)	Greenhouse-Geisser (Sum of Squares), F value
<i>Assistance</i>		0.64 (10681.84) F = 228.75
Pre-test	11.09 (6.06)**	
Post 1 (6 months)	16.64 (4.64)**	
Post 2 (12 months)	18.94 (3.67)**	
Post 3 (2 years)	20.66 (2.50)**	
<i>Interaction</i>		0.49 (35283.20) F = 265.11
Pre-test	20.82 (10.58)**	
Post 1 (6 months)	30.22 (6.90)**	
Post 2 (12 months)	31.71 (6.93)**	
Post 3 (2 years)	39.27 (7.27)**	
<i>Support</i>		0.74 (22163.15) F = 206.78
Pre-test	13.01 (7.31)**	
Post 1 (6 months)	16.35 (6.55)**	
Post 2 (12 months)	22.54 (7.09)**	
Post 3 (2 years)	26.35 (3.40)**	
Pillai's Trace 0.927, F = 275.55; hypothesis df = 9		
Wilks' Lambda 0.073		

Note: ** indicates pair wise comparisons $p < 0.05$

a very large amount. The Greenhouse-Geisser epsilon values of 0.64, 0.49 and 0.74 for each of the three father involvement variables respectively indicate values of near 1.0, which suggest no or very little violation of the assumption of sphericity.

Results for within-subjects contrasts indicate that the means for each of the three fatherhood variables significantly increase across time for every pair. Starting with assistance, the pre-test mean improved from 11.09 to 16.63 by month six and continued to increase until year two when the mean reached 20.66. Interaction increased from 20.82 at the pre-test to 30.12 by month six and then a smaller, but still significant increase to month 12 ($M = 31.70$) and then a larger increase by year two ($M = 39.27$). This result was particularly persuasive given interaction is considered the highest level of father involvement in this study. Support also steadily increased across time, starting at a mean of 13.01 at the pre-test, then increasing to 16.35 by month six and ending at 26.35 at two years. All means, standard deviations, and F values appear in Table 4.

Discussion

This paper presented a preliminary longitudinal evaluation of young father's involvement program conducted within the scope of a teen parenting program in Arlington County, Virginia. The parenting program was based on Prochaska's TTM and empowerment theory, and it ran from 2003 to 2007, serving some 310 young fathers. Analysis presented above focused on the impact of fatherhood involvement from the beginning of the father's enrollment in the program through program completion and two years post-program. The vast majority of the fathers in this program were of Hispanic origin.

Results from analysis conducted at the outset of the program indicated there were significant relationships between the age of the child and interaction with and support from the father, and age of the father and assistance provided to the child. These relationships did not necessarily reflect expectations, for example, age of the father was negatively associated with assistance, indicating older fathers were providing less assistance. This could well be a reflection of close-knit and extended families prevalent in this program, where grandparents frequently stepped in to intervene between young fathers and mothers. In this case, grandparents or other family members may have pressured young fathers to become involved with their children and take some responsibility for them. It could also be a result of younger fathers having better relationships with the mother's of their children.

Results from post-test analysis revealed that by year two, the age of the child was negatively correlated with father assistance. In practice, this meant that older children received less assistance from fathers, which may have occurred because fathers were working or in school to a greater extent. This explanation is bolstered by the large increase in mean scores of support by year two.

General linear model analysis compared the changes in mean scores of the three father involvement scales over time. The model itself explained a very high 93% of the variance in the scales, and each time comparison across every variable was significant. Such results are dramatic and indicate that mean scores steadily

increased throughout this fatherhood program and continued to increase after the program, providing a good illustration of the maintenance phase of Prochaska's TTM. We believe that these results alone provide solid support for the argument that fatherhood programs provide a valuable service to children, families, and ultimately, to communities.

Although the study did not specifically test Prochaska's phases of the TTM, results could be viewed as anecdotal support for the theory. Fathers clearly went through five stages of behavioral change in this program, from pre-contemplation at intake, through contemplation at the beginning of the program, to preparation later on, and then action and maintenance. The movement of fathers through these phases is evident from the changes in the scores on each father involvement scale from pre-test to two years post-program. Future studies could examine the TTM more precisely.

Results from this study also indicate that certain areas of father involvement should be targeted for improvement in future programs that serve similar populations. For example, although the mean scores for assistance increased at each time period, at two years the mean score was 24, whereas the highest possible score on the scale was 42. This indicates that assistance activities such as changing the cleaning up after the baby are still not widely conducted by the baby's fathers, a result which supports previous research in this area (Thompson and Walker 2004). Previous studies have indicated some maternal barriers to this type of father involvement regardless of ethnicity (e.g., Rhein et al. 1997), while others argue cultural gender roles may prevent Hispanic fathers from fully engaging in assistance activities (e.g., Julian et al. 1994). Informal discussions with the young fathers in this study revealed that anecdotally, those who participated in assistance type activities with their children found them very rewarding and were therefore likely to continue those activities. Future father intervention programs with populations like this one should consider inclusion of a lesson or module that addresses gender deconstruction in order to address gender and cultural mindsets about assistance activities.

Anecdotally, we also found that fathers in this program demonstrated increased knowledge and improved attitudes about fatherhood in general. This was most likely a reflection of the program's curricula that focused on teaching fathers about children's psychological and physiological development. The curricula also examined the effects of fatherlessness. Initially many of the fathers had no idea the extent to which the absence of a father could negatively affect a child. We would recommend that future father intervention programs include these elements.

There are several shortcomings of this study. First is the pre- post-test design. At the outset of the parenting program, valiant attempts were made to recruit a control group. However not unlike similar programs, we had problems recruiting and retaining control group subjects. Several individuals recruited actually joined the program, and others were not interested in completing pre- and post-testing. We would recommend that future programs use financial incentives to recruit control groups where possible.

A second shortcoming of this study is inherent problems associated with self-reported data (Babbie 2006). In this study, this issue has been minimized by the use

of multiple time comparisons making it unlikely for respondents to answer inaccurately during all four tests. A third shortcoming is threats to validity. As with any program evaluation, the effects of historical events and attrition are difficult to control and we cannot say with certainty that this fatherhood program caused increased participation in father involvement. There may have been events outside of the study that effected the father's involvement with their children, such as the death of a parent or grandchild, which could have sparked increased interest in children. Attrition did occur to some degree in this program as 301 fathers were pre-tested but only 205 completed all three post-tests. Because intake occurred at different times during the year, some 52 fathers were not yet eligible for the two year post-test at the time of this study. The remaining 44 could not be located or dropped out of the program along the way. There were also several fathers who were temporarily incarcerated during the course of the program. Taking these factors into consideration, the attrition rate from pre-test to two years post-program was 14.61 percent.¹ Ideally, follow up post-tests should be done with all fathers from this study at five and seven years to fully understand how father involvement with this group has been affected by the *Caring Equation*, however, due to funding restrictions, this was not possible.

It would also have been beneficial in the program analysis to include a measure of the level of father's participation in the program. Although such a measure was included at the start of the program, data recording errors prevented us from using the measure in the analysis. However, given the actual attrition rate of fathers in this program was six percent, and father's had to complete 80% of the curriculum before being presented with a completion certificate, we are confident that program participation was high. From case notes and sign in sheets we noticed that some father's attendance was sporadic during the first several months, but following this, attendance increased and remained consistent. This also coincided with the program moving to weekend and evening hours to allow for changing work and school schedules.

Another factor worth examining in future studies that use populations similar to the one used here is the gender of the child. A number of researchers have noted that male children hold a privileged position in Hispanic families and often have a very close relationship with their mothers (Zayas 1992), perhaps preventing high levels of father involvement.

As seen in literature reviewed in this study, there are numerous cultural differences in parenting attitudes and behaviors. Hispanics make up the largest minority group in the United States and are the fastest growing minority group (U.S. Census 2008), thus being able to identify need areas and assign resources to members of this group is vital to community well-being. Future studies should also focus on differences between Hispanic groups—Saracho and Spodek (2007) point out there are numerous cultural difference in attitudes toward parenting between Mexican and other Hispanic fathers that are usually not examined.

In 2003, when Fagan et al. published their study on adolescent father involvement, there had been a movement in social services to fund adolescent

¹ The actual program attrition rate was less than half this rate.

parenting programs like the one in the current study. Despite results from these programs indicating they have tremendous potential for improving parenting, the trend shifted to funding abstinence programs. In 2006, the United States experienced its first significant increase in teenage pregnancy rates in 19 years (Stein 2007). One could argue that although abstinence programs have a place in the education of young people, ignoring the social needs of those teenagers who invariably will become parents at young ages no matter what they are told, does little to alleviate the risks associated with father absence.

Fatherhood programs can also restore family bonds or at least repair them, and children are more likely to become productive citizens if they have a good relationship with their fathers. The greater benefit from these programs is that communities can become more stable, both financially and emotionally.

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